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ABSTRACT

This guide, second in a series of four volumes, offers a method of surveying parents' attitudes about choosing schools for their children and provides a survey instrument used over a period of 5 years in four Massachusetts urban school districts. Section 1 introduces the basic research questions pursued in the survey. Section 2, "The Parent Survey: What Is It? What Does It Do?" describes the structure and general functioning of the survey model. Surveys sent home to parents were comprised of three basic elements: (1) respondents' declaration of the kind of schooling they prefer; (2) respondents' declaration of willingness to have their children attend a school outside their neighborhood attendance area; and (3) background data on respondents. "The Process: Planning Surveys for Parent/Professional Choice," section 3, describes the role played by such parent and professional surveys in a comprehensive planning process leading to school systems based upon choice. Examples are provided from experiences of the four Massachusetts communities. Section 4, "Reflections on the Process," considers various issues raised by use of parent/professional surveys and provides tentative answers to questions that emerge from survey use. Section 5 offers further sources of information. (CJH)

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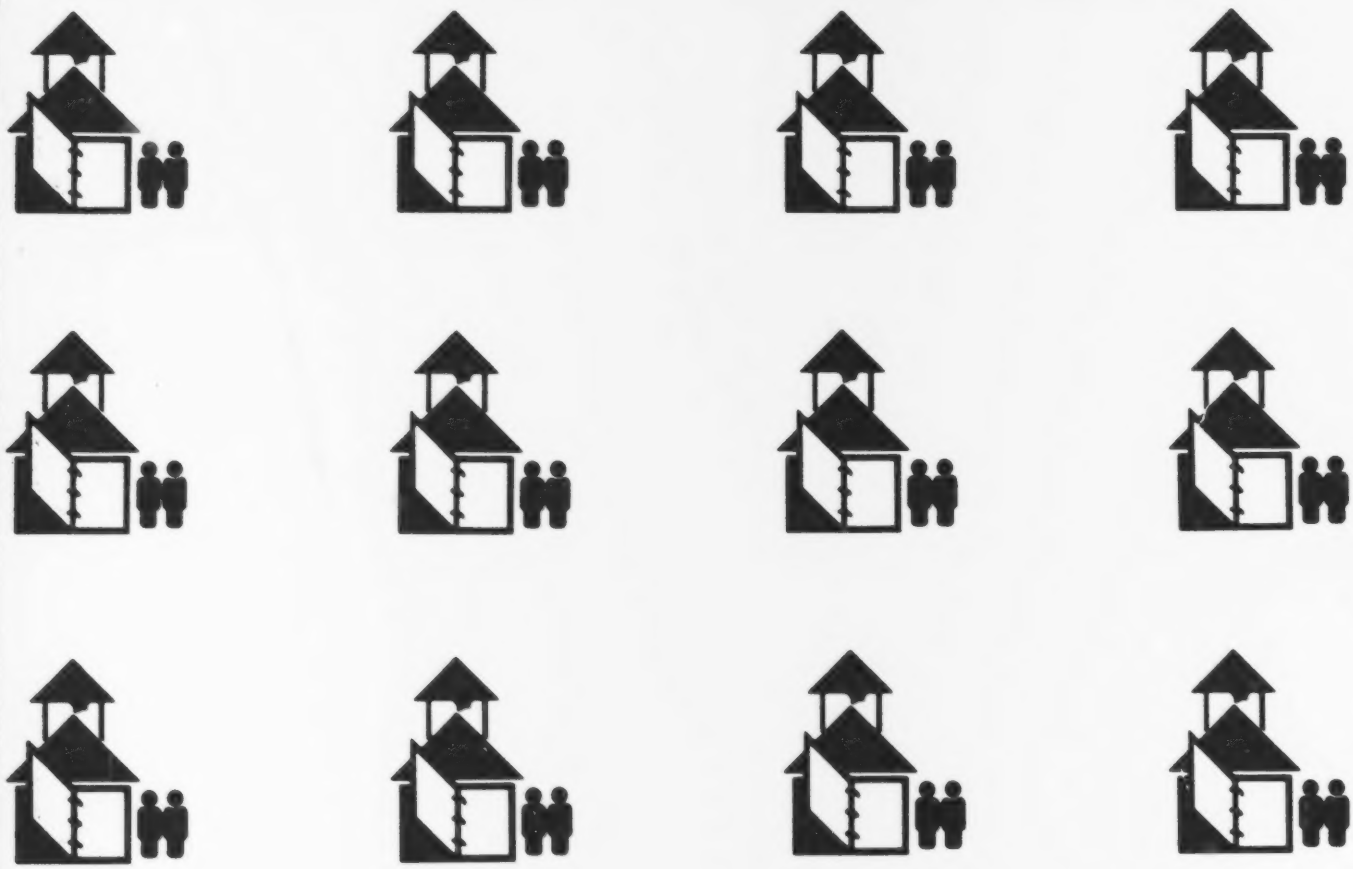
Planning for Parent Choice

A Guide to Parent Surveys and Parent Involvement in Planning for Parent and Professional Choice in the Public Schools



Evans Clinchy

Institute for Responsive Education

EA 019 493

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PLANNING FOR PARENT CHOICE
A Guide to Parent Surveys and Parent Involvement in Planning for Parent and Professional Choice in the Public Schools

by Evans Clinchy

January 1987
Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309

"In a democracy, you can't just tell people what's good for them and then impose it on them whether they want it or not. Yet that's what we have always done in public education. That's why so many parent want to take their children out of the public schools and — using tuition tax credits or vouchers — put them in private or parochial schools. That is often the only way that parents can choose the kind of education their children will receive.

"We are all individuals. We learn and work in different ways. If you give students, teachers and principals a chance to learn and work in an environment they prefer — a place they have chosen of their own free will, where they feel comfortable and respected — we think they will direct their energies towards a common goal: excellence."

— George Tsapatsaris, Project
Director for Magnet Schools,
Lowell Public Schools, Lowell, MA

"I think a good modern school system ought to provide as many options as possible. In that sense, I think *every* school ought to compete with every other school. One of the major problems we have in the public schools is that they all point to the almighty norm, with the result that they offer a dull and uninteresting education for children. What we need is to provide enough options — different kinds of good educational programs — to satisfy the total demand of parents and teachers and students."

— Eugene T. Reville,
Superintendent of Schools,
Buffalo Public Schools, Buffalo, NY

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Other handbooks produced by this project were authored by Laura Ferguson and Ross Zerchykov. Owen Heleen, Publications Director, edited the series of publications; Mary Westropp provided research assistance; and Catherine Baker and Betsy Bigelow provided word processing and secretarial support.

FOREWORD

An Introduction to the Series "Parent Choice and the Public Schools"

by Ross Zerchykov,
Research Director, Institute for Responsive Education

What determines where children in America go to school? In the vast majority of cases, it is where they and their parents live. But, amidst all the current debate about excellence in education, we never hear of an educational reason why public school children are most often assigned to schools on the basis of place of residence. This system has serious ramifications for equality in our society.

In this and the other volumes in our series "Parent Choice and the Public Schools," we examine the question: Why must where a family can afford to buy or rent housing be the determining factor in where a child goes to school?

We hope this series of publications will be helpful to all those -- parents and taxpayers, school leaders and government officials -- who are beginning to question this connection between education and real estate.

One obvious explanation for the connection (other than inertia) is cost: assignment by residency is relatively simple and holds down administrative and transportation costs, thereby freeing up resources for curriculum and instruction. Arguments

against parent choice as an alternative assignment model often also invoke concern that parent choice could lead to racial resegregation and/or exacerbate socioeconomic segregation. Furthermore, some say increased choice would only be exercised by the more informed, active and educationally ambitious of parents, thereby leading to some schools becoming hotbeds of parent support and involvement, while others become pockets of apathy.

Opening up choice among schools, others argue, would invigorate all schools through competition. Indifferent schools would no longer attract parents and, as in the business world, would go out of business to be replaced by other, more "responsive" schools.

Such claims, when repeated often enough, can begin to sound like self-evident truths. The first of our series of publications, Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research, is designed to shed some light on the costs and benefits of different kinds of parent choice and provide summary answers to the most frequently asked questions about parent choice, based on an analysis of the research and evaluation studies of various parent choice initiatives in the United States, including voucher experiments, magnet schools, public schools of choice and open enrollment programs. The answers, as always, are not definitive or tidy, and some questions can never be answered within the limits of experimentation in education (e.g., what would be the impact of a totally free market in education? -- would consumer sovereignty and the resulting competition equalize opportunities,

and would the resulting competition lead to innovation and excellence? Or, would suppliers in the educational market, like suppliers in all markets, strive to restrict competition?)

Nonetheless, the research evidence is instructive and tells us enough to sift through and put aside some of the claims and counter-claims about choice.

One such claim that could be used to justify the current system of assigning pupils to schools on the basis of residence is that parents don't want anything else. They like the "neighborhood school," as witnessed by community opposition to school closings and "forced busing." And, some contend, choice is irrelevant anyway since, basically, all parents want the same thing: good schools and a good education for their children.

Contrary evidence, however, comes from data in the Gallup Poll on education showing that a significant majority of parents want more choice. (Phi Delta Kappan, September 1986)

But, for local citizens and school leaders, nationally aggregated opinions are less important than local sentiment. One way to find out if local parents want more choice is to simply ask them. A method for doing so, for identifying whether parents want more choice, under what conditions, and what kinds of education they would choose is described in the second volume in our series, Planning for Parent Choice, which offers a step-by-step guide to surveying parents, and provides a method and a survey instrument that has been used over a period of five years in four Massachusetts urban school districts.

There is research evidence, especially from the intensive evaluation of 1970s voucher experiments in Alum Rock, California and other locations, which does show that there is cause for the concern that not all groups of parents participate equally in choice programs, that, in fact, more informed (and affluent) parents are more likely to participate in, and hence benefit from, increased opportunities for parent choice. In those cases, the "information deficits" suffered by parents were attributed to schools disseminating information only in the form of print material in the English language. These dissemination strategies may have been appropriate for middle-class, white-collar settings but were not effective for poor or linguistic minority parents. Current practices, happily, are more sensitive to the different ways that information reaches different kinds of parent populations.

The third volume in this series is a Parent Information Strategies providing short profiles, with nuts- and-bolts kind of information, about the range of exemplary parent information strategies from 23 school districts in 13 states across the nation.

Our fourth volume, A Consumer's Guide to Schoools of Choice addresses parents who are in the enviable position of being able to choose but could use help in making the right fit between their aspirations and values and a particular school. This guide is intended to give such parents real-life descriptions of what actually goes on in schools of choice. What is different in

schools that advertise themselves as having an emphasis on a particular style or philosophy of teaching -- i.e., "basic skills" or "classical education" or "child-centered, developmental approach" -- or a particular curricular emphasis, i.e., "the arts" or "science and technology?" The Consumer's Guide elaborates the assumptions about how children learn that lie behind such labels and provides a checklist that enables parents to decide whether their aspirations for and knowledge about their children will match up with the labels that diversified public schools of choice use in describing themselves. The Consumer's Guide sketches daily activities in ten schools in six different school districts in Massachusetts and New York.

Such illustrations belie the general assumption that all parents want the same kind of "good education," an assumption that can and has been used as an argument against providing expanded opportunities for parent choice. The vignettes are all taken from public schools of choice, many of which have long waiting lists, indicating that many parents have a desire for more options than are currently available.

We don't pretend to have all the answers to the puzzle facing local school decision-makers -- school and government officials and parents and citizens -- as they consider ways to respond to the growing desire for more choice of some kind. Neither do we believe that parent choice will solve all of the educational problems facing our nation today. Rather, we prefer

to remain open-minded and offer this publication and its companion volumes to other open-minded readers -- government officials (at all levels), school administrators, and parents and taxpayers -- who have questioned whether we should assign all students to the same kinds of schools on the basis of residency and not according to parental aspirations or children's learning styles.

ONE: INTRODUCTION AND USER'S GUIDE

Parents choosing the public schools their children will attend may well be an idea whose time has come. But it is not yet a familiar or widespread practice in most of our public school systems. Parent choice can potentially lead to a major restructuring of the way public school systems operate and can alter the relationships among parents, teachers, administrators and the schools. If parents can choose a school for their children, shouldn't teachers be able to choose a school to teach in and an educational philosophy to practice? Choice then holds real potential as a force for upgrading the conditions of teaching.

Since educational decisionmakers are -- quite properly -- not overly interested in leaping off a political cliff with such an unfamiliar practice, we feel that the wisest course for any public school system to take if it wishes to move towards parent choice is to present the notion of choice to a local community as an idea to be explored and studied, to essentially conduct a feasibility study. In our experiments, the most valuable tool in a feasibility study is to ask people what they think.

Such an exploration and study should involve the board of education, the administrative staff of the system, the teachers and principals in the schools and most especially the parents whose children will be directly involved as well as the citizenry

whose tax dollars will be spent in any re-organized system which provides choice for both parents and professionals.

There is an obvious set of questions that any such exploration must attempt to answer:

- Do the school system's parents <u>want</u> to be able to choose the schools their children will attend?

- If so, what different kinds of schooling do parents wish their local school system to create and make available for choice?

- Once having chosen a school, would parents be willing to have their children transported in order to attend that school?

- Once the parents have chosen the kinds of schools they want for their children, are there teachers and principals in the system who wish to practice those kinds of schooling?

- And if there are, are those teachers and principals willing to transfer voluntarily to a new building in order to practice the kind of schooling both they and the parents want?

The parent and professional survey model and the planning process described in this handbook can provide answers to these questions and a way of converting such answers into a local public school system based upon a diversity of schools and parent/professional choice.

The surveys and the planning process described here have been developed and tested in four Massachusetts urban school districts -- Lowell, Worcester, Fall River and New Bedford. In these four communities, the surveys have have provided school administrators and planners with crucial information such as:

- whether a significantly large number of the parents served by the school system want to be able to choose the kind of schooling their children will receive.

- what the specific choices, i.e., the different kinds of schools, are that the parents want for their children.

- what the specific kinds of schooling are that teachers want to practice.

- a rough idea of how many parents want each particular kind of school and what the racial/ethnic breakdown of such parental choices is likely to be.

- a general idea of how many parents making such choices would be willing to have their children transported in order to obtain the kind of schooling they want.

- a fairly clear idea of how many teachers wish to practice each of the different kinds of schooling and whether there is a rough match between the kinds of schooling parents want and the kinds of schooling teachers and principals wish to practice.

- a general idea of how many teachers would be willing to transfer voluntarily to a new school in order to practice the kind of schooling they have chosen.

While the survey and planning model developed in these four communities was created to aid in magnet school planning and was thus addressed to the challenge of desegregation, it is equally applicable to any school district seeking to implement choice, whether desegregation is involved or not.

The basic survey model -- its structure and general functioning -- is described in Section Two below.

This is followed, in Section Three, by a description of the role played by such parent and professional surveys in a comprehensive planning process leading to school systems based upon choice. Concrete examples are provided from the experiences of the four Massachusetts communities. We use these examples

both to illustrate how the survey model has been used and to suggest how it and the information gained from it can be used for purposes wider than desegregation.

In Section Four, we pause to reflect on some of the issues raised by the use of parent/professional surveys and to provide at least some tentative answers to some of the questions that emerge from such survey use.

In Section Five, we then attempt to provide the reader with some further sources of information.

A general review of the available research on parent choice is available in a companion volume to this handbook, Parent Choice: A Digest of The Research.

TWO: THE PARENT/PROFESSIONAL SURVEY: WHAT IS IT? WHAT DOES IT DO?

Our basic survey model is depicted on the following pages. We offer two examples. The first is a survey sent home to every parent of public school children kindergarten through grade 7 in Worcester, Massachusetts, (a total of 14,311 surveys distributed) in January 1982. The same survey items, modified slightly for use with teachers and principals, would serve for professional staff.

The second example is a survey sent home to the parents of all kindergarten through grade 6 parents in the New Bedford, Massachusetts, public schools in April 1986 (a total of 8,727 surveys distributed). The same survey items, suitably adapted for the purpose, were also distributed to all teachers and principals in the New Bedford system.

These surveys are made up of three basic elements:

1. Respondents' declaration of what kind of schooling they would prefer (for their children, in the case of parents and to practice, in the case of professional staff).

2. Respondents' declaration of a willingness to have their children go to a school outside their neighborhood attendance area. (For teachers, the corresponding item would solicit information on willingness to transfer to another school).

3. Background data on respondents (ethnicity, school location, etc.).

It is important to note that these surveys avoid the more open-ended, "what do you want" kind of questions. Open-ended questions can leave planners with the problem of interpreting many diverse, differently phrased responses.

One should also note that, although there is some overlap, the educational options described in each survey can and do vary. The process of determining the options to be included in a survey is described below.

It should be pointed out here that the individual items in both of these surveys -- the different types of schooling and the possible curricular options -- were determined by citywide parent planning councils made up of parents representing every public school in each of the two cities. This parental determination of survey items is described in greater detail in Section Three below.

A MESSAGE TO ALL K-7 PARENTS OF THE WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FROM: THE CITYWIDE PARENT PLANNING ADVISORY COUNCIL

Dear Fellow Parents and Guardians:

The Worcester Public Schools is planning to set up several "Magnet" elementary schools as part of a three year plan to reduce minority isolation and to give parents a choice of the kind of schooling they want for their children.

"Magnet" schools are schools that:

- offer a particular kind of schooling (such as "back to basics" or "continuous progress"), or offer a special curriculum (such as the arts or science and technology).
- teach all of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic but do it in special and different ways.
- attract volunteer students from outside their local district.
- have strong involvement of parents.

We are not asking you to sign your child up for any particular school. We need to know the different kinds of schools and programs YOU would like to have for your children. Please read the following pages and follow directions on each page. Have your child take the completed forms back to his/her teacher.

If you have any questions or need help, call your school principal or the Parent Information Center, Sharon Afutu/Lillian Perez 799-3543.

John E. Durkin
Superintendent of Schools

Robert Knott, Co-chairperson
Citywide Parent Planning Advisory Council

Marie Piergallini, Co-chairperson
Citywide Parent Planning Advisory Council

Gail Aframe, Chairperson
Survey Sub-committee

Christine Johnson, Chairperson
Magnet School Sub-committee

"In accordance with Federal and State Laws including, but not limiting it to Title IX and Chapter 622, the Worcester Public School System is committed to all persons who are entitled to attend public schools, work and advance on the basis of merit and ability regardless of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin or handicap."

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR MAGNET SCHOOLS

Please read the following descriptions of special programs or courses of study that the magnet school could offer. Write the number "1" in the box next to the kind of program you would most like your child to attend. Write the number "2" in the box next to the program that would be your second choice, the number "3" next to your third choice, the number "4" next to your fourth choice and "5" next to your least favorite choice. If you want different programs for each of your children, you may fill out a form for each child.

☐ The Science and Technology Program - emphasizes the methods of scientific inquiry, experimentation and reasoning. The curriculum would include special projects in such disciplines as biology, botony, astronomy, physics, mathematics and such modern technology as computers and data processing equipment.

☐ The Physical Health and Environmental Program - emphasizes the health sciences and the effect that society and the environment have on each other. Students will work on projects which combine the physical and the social sciences and learn how the interaction can have both positive and negative effects on the way we live.

☐ The Fine, Applied and Performing Arts Program - will provide students with an opportunity to develop their artistic skills both as artists and as observers of the arts. The traditional language arts skills of reading and writing will be incorporated into the study and practice of acting, painting, music, sculpture, dance and other arts activities selected by parents for their children.

☐ Gifted and Talented Program - provides students with the opportunity to develop their special talents and do advanced work in both academic subjects and in practical areas such as carpentry, computers, electricity and mechanical skills.

☐ The Multi-Cultural Program - would provide students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds with the opportunity to learn the languages and learn about the different cultures that make up the modern world.

EDUCATIONAL "OPTIONS" OR "TYPES" OF SCHOOLS

Please read the following descriptions of different kinds of schools. Write the number "1" in the box next to the kind of school you would most like your child to attend. Write the number "2" in the box next to the school that would be your second choice, the number "3" next to your third choice, the number "4" next to your fourth choice and "5" next to your least favorite choice. If you want different schools for each of your children, you may fill out a form for each child.

☐ The Continuous Progress Option - encourages students to progress through a carefully defined curriculum at their own best rate of speed. A child will be able to advance as fast as possible in each subject area and may be working at different grade levels in different subjects. The curriculum will stress language arts and mathematics.

☐ The Developmental Option - emphasizes the intellectual, social, physical and emotional development of your child. As students participate in activities which help them learn about objects, ideas, other children and adults, they will learn how to teach themselves and work independently in specially designed learning centers.

☐ The Fundamental Option - concentrates on teaching students the basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic and responsibility. The school emphasizes discipline and order. Parents and teachers work together to guarantee that the school has high academic standards and that all students are working at grade level or above.

☐ The Montessori Option - provides an educational environment that fits each stage of a student's intellectual and physical development. Students select their work with guidance from their teacher and use special, self-correcting learning materials to develop skill in language, mathematics, practical-life and sensorial activities. The curriculum is based on the idea that children are naturally curious, want to learn and like to work on things which interest them.

☐ The Microsociety Option - provides a program designed to help students learn how society works. Students will not only learn about all aspects of the city in which they live, but will set up and run their own society in school, including banks, business corporations, a system of government, a newspaper and publishing house, an art gallery and a theatre company. Students will learn that the basic skills are useful and can be used to run their in-school society as well as the world outside school.

In order to complete this survey, we need you to provide the following information:

1. In order to have your child attend the kind of magnet school you want, would you be willing to have your child go to school outside his/her neighborhood district, with FREE transportation provided?

   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

2. If a magnet school had an all day kindergarten, would you be more likely to send your child to a magnet school?

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. What race or ethnic group does your child/children belong to? Please check the correct box.

   ☐ Black ☐ American Indian

   ☐ Hispanic ☐ Oriental/Asian

   ☐ White/Non Hispanic ☐ Other/Specify

4. We would like the following information, but you are not required to supply it if you do not wish to:

   Grade (preschool - grade 7). Please list the grade.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Name of Parent or Guardian (optional):

   _____

   Address: _____

   _____

   Telephone: _____

Please have your child return these forms to his/her teacher.

WORCESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Sara J. Robertson, Chairperson
Mark J. Andrews
John F. Doherty
Konstantina B. Lukes
Philip J. Middrie
Jane D. O'Brien
Edmund J. Tierney

CHAPTER 636
New Bedford Public Schools
455 COUNTY STREET
NEW BEDFORD, MA 02740
TEL. (617) 997-4511, EXT. 418
COORDINATOR — DIANE SOUZA

A MESSAGE TO ALL KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE SIX PARENTS
OF THE NEW BEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FROM: THE CHAPTER 636 PARENT/EDUCATORS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The New Bedford Public Schools are planning to set up neighborhood district "magnet" elementary schools as part of a long range plan to reduce minority isolation and give parents a choice of the kind of instruction they want for their children.

"Magnet" schools are schools that:

-TEACH ALL OF THE BASIC SKILLS OF READING, WRITING, AND MATHEMATICS BUT IN SPECIAL AND DIFFERENT WAYS.

-offer themes for special kinds of curriculum or schools.

-attract volunteer students from outside the neighborhood school district when classroom openings exist.

-have strong community involvement.

We are NOT asking you to enroll your child for any particular school. We need to know the different kinds of schools YOU would like to have for your children. Please read the following pages and follow directions on each page. Have your child take the completed surveys to his/her teacher by Friday, April 18th. One survey should be completed by each family.

If you have any questions or need help, please contact the Chapter 636 office at 997-4511, ext. 418.

Mr. Constantine T. Nanopoulos
Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Joseph S. Silva, Jr.
Assistant Superintendent

Mrs. Diane L. Souza
Chapter 636 Coordinator

and
The Parent/Educators Advisory Council

DIRECTIONS

Rate each of the following kinds of schools using the following codes. Circle the appropriate number.

1 = Very Negative (I DEFINITELY WOULD NOT send my child to this school.)

2 = Negative (I WOULD NOT send my child to this school.)

3 = Medial (I MAY send my child to this school.)

4 = Positive (I WOULD send my child to this school.)

5 = Very Positive (I DEFINITELY WOULD send my child to this school.)

1 2 3 4 5 THE ADVANCED STUDIES SCHOOL

The Advanced Studies School would provide students of advanced learning abilities with challenging curriculum activities. Students will be able to advance as fast as possible in each subject area. They will be offered academically challenging work as well as enriching activities in the visual and performing arts, sciences, communication skills, computers and foreign languages.

1 2 3 4 5 THE COMMUNICATIONS SCHOOL

The Communications School would enable students to receive instructions that would strengthen communication skills: writing, reading and oral language. Strong writing skills would be developed: creative writing, report writing, poetry, etc. A school newspaper could be developed. Reading skills will be strengthened in a variety of ways. Oral language skills would be developed through music, theater, storytelling, radio and television studies. Listening activities and computer instruction would supplement classroom instruction.

1 2 3 4 5 THE WORLD OF WORK SCHOOL

The World of Work School brings the real world into the classroom. Students will learn about careers and that education plays an important role in attaining one's career choice. Children will, through contact with community people and field trips, become familiar with local government officials, doctors, nurses, shopkeepers, architects, policemen, factory workers and others who can provide children with particular values, informatio knowledge about the real world. Ha experiences in computer labs and wor would provide children with instructic cooking, carpentry, sewing, plumbing, accounting, banking, etc.

1 2 3 4 5 THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

The International School proposes to capitalize on the rich diversity of New Bedford's population and to make students more appreciative of their own, and other people's ethnic backgrounds. Classes might emphasize the cultural heritage of each student. Traditions, beliefs, language, art, music, dance and other cultural expressions would be introduced to the students, as well as the basic skills courses - which would also be taught to make the most of the magnet theme.

1 2 3 4 5 THE ARTS SCHOOL

The Arts School would provide students with opportunities to experience an integrated arts curriculum. Activities in the performing arts could involve music, drama, dance and television. Fine arts activities could include sculpture, painting, photography and architecture. Applied arts activities could include needlework, graphics, gardening, advertising and cooking.

1 2 3 4 5 THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE SCHOOL

The Foreign Language School would provide all students the opportunity to learn a foreign language. Students will be taught foreign languages through games and songs in a natural setting beginning with an oral approach stressing listening, speaking, reading, and writing respectively. Please check the language you would be interested in:

____Spanish ____Portuguese
____Crioulo ____French
____Other, specify _____

1 2 3 4 5 THE MATH/SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY SCHOOL

The Math/Science Technology School would emphasize the methods of scientific inquiry, experimentation and reasoning. The curriculum could include special projects in areas such as botany, biology, astronomy, physics, oceanography, and mathematics. Students would be involved in computer and data processing activities.

1 2 3 4 5 THE PHYSICAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION SCHOOL

The Physical Health and Education School would emphasize the health sciences and the effect that society and the environment have on each other. Students would work on projects which combine the physical and social sciences and learn how the interaction can have both positive and negative effects on the way we live. Physical education activities would be strongly stressed.

THE INTEGRATED LEARNING SCHOOL

The Integrated Learning School proposes to integrate reading, writing and mathematics with individual and group projects in science, history, geography, art and children's literature. Rather than learning the three R's in isolation, children would develop these skills through activities and projects designed around their interests and abilities. Writing, including book reports, science reports, stories and journals, would be expected on a daily basis. Children would work at their own level and at their own pace. Independence, self-discipline and a love of learning would be fostered.

In order to complete this survey, we need the following nformation:

1. In order to have your child attend the kind of magnet school you want, would you be willing to have your child go to school outside his/her neighborhood district, with FREE transportation provided?

   ____yes ____no ____maybe

2. What race or ethnic group does your child/children belong to? Please check the appropriate space.

   ____American Indian ____Black
   ____Cape Verdean ____Hispanic
   ____Oriental/Asian ____White/Non-Hispanic
   ____Other, please specify _____

3. Please list below the names, school and grade of each child.

Name	School	Grade
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

4. I have read this survey.

   Parent's Signature _____

PLEASE HAVE YOUR CHILD RETURN THIS SURVEY TO HIS/HER TEACHER. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION.

Survey Administration and Uses of the Data

Who Gets the Survey?

In the field experiences thus far, survey instruments have been used with all parents who might be affected by any proposed choice plan and, in two cases (Fall River and New Bedford) to all affected members of the professional staff.

In all four cases, the distribution of survey forms was limited to parents of public elementary school children, including kindergarten parents and parents of seventh graders, since none of these choice plans have dealt as yet with possible high school options.

In none of the cases were survey forms given to parents of pre-school children or parents with children in private or parochial schools. Under ideal circumstances, of course, it would be desirable to have these parents surveyed as well, but it is often difficult for public school systems to reach these parents.

The survey therefore is obviously not a sampling survey, but rather an attempt to discover the actual number of parents who want choice and what their actual choices are. In analyzing the results no attempt is made to generalize beyond the actual survey results, i.e. the actual numbers of respondents and the choices they make.

How Is It Administered?

These are paper and pencil surveys. Respondents are asked to fill out the survey form and return it. As the discussion in Section Three below points out, experience in the four cities has shown that sending the survey home with the children in the public schools and getting it back the same way has resulted in the highest response rate.

Applications of the Survey

This survey model can be used in a number of different situations and for slightly different purposes. Experience with schools of choice in the four Massachusetts communities and across the country suggests that there are three basic ways of organizing parent choice.

Citywide Schools of Choice

Citywide schools of choice are schools -- and most often they are brand new schools -- that are established without any geographic attendance zones and that therefore are open to students from anywhere in the school district, no matter where they happen to live.

For instance, all of Buffalo's 13 true "magnet" schools were established by closing existing neighborhood schools and re-opening them as citywide magnets. No preference in admission was given to students who either had previously attended the schools or who happened to live nearby.

In other cases, citywide schools of choice are established essentially because they offer an unusual kind of schooling that is desired by a fairly large number of parents who are scattered all over the school district rather than being concentrated in one geographic area. Montessori schools are good examples of a type of schooling that is often set up as a citywide school.

Sub-district Schools of Choice

Again in large urban districts and again in order to minimize the need for transportation, the large district will be "decentralized" by being divided into sub-districts, often with each sub-district having its own "district superintendent" and administrative staff.

In Boston, for instance, there are five such sub-districts, called "community school districts," while New York City's public schools are divided into 36 such community school districts.

Once the large system has been divided in this fashion, schools of choice can be created within each sub-district and parents limited to choosing schools in the district in which they happen to live. Each such district, if it is large enough, can offer the full range of schools of choice, running from very traditional to non-traditional schools, with the number of each type of school determined as a result of parent/professional surveys conducted within each district.

District or "Neighborhood" Schools of Choice

District schools of choice retain their conventional geographic attendance zones. Children who live in the school's attendance zone are given first preference when their parents choose. In some cases, parents are guaranteed that their children can attend the school if that is what they want. Students from outside the school's established attendance zone can choose the school only if there is "space available," that is, only if there are "extra" seats that are not being occupied by students from the school's regular attendance zone.

In Fall River, Massachusetts, as part of the overall system-wide planning process, <u>every</u> elementary and junior high school in the system (31 schools in all) were invited and encouraged by the local school board and the central administration to conduct their own planning process, involving the principal, the teachers and the school's parent body. The aim of the planning was for each school, using the results of the district-wide parent and teacher surveys, to decide what kind of school of choice it wished to become.

The aim in Fall River is that <u>every</u> school in the system will become a "district school of choice," with preference given to children living in each school's attendance zone.

Avoiding the Pitfalls of Inadequate Planning

The surveys described here <u>and</u> the planning process in which those surveys are imbedded (to be described in greater detail in

Section Three below) can help to avoid some very common problems associated with the creation of schools of choice. These are problems that have led some educators to question the wisdom and value of parent choice itself.

Unwelcome Autocracy

In many school systems that have instituted magnet schools or schools of choice, the decisions as to what different kinds of schools (or educational options) the school system will offer have been made essentially by the central administration with, of course, the ultimate authority resting with the local school board.

This practice has often led to a perception on the part of parents (and teachers and principals as well) that their wishes have been ignored -- or never even asked for -- and that once again they have little say over what is going to happen to their children in the public schools.

While magnets created in this fashion have often been highly popular and have succeeded in attracting parents and students, there have also been cases where central administrators have badly misjudged what the parents really wanted.

In Worcester, Massachusetts, for instance, at least one central planner was convinced that a school that operated on a 220-day school year and a longer school day would be immensely popular with parents. When parents, however, were asked as part

of a survey whether this was so, they turned thumbs down on the idea.

Indeed, in the most successful choice systems -- such as those in Buffalo, and the four Massachusetts communities referred to above -- there has been intensive involvement of parents and other community people in this decisionmaking process, and most parents feel that they and their wishes are being properly respected.

First Class/Second Class Schools

Virtually every school system, large or small, urban or suburban, that has instituted one or more "magnet" schools or schools of choice while leaving other schools in the system as non-magnets or non-choice schools has run headlong into this problem.

No matter how hard the planners of the choice system try to make it clear that they are not in the business of creating "elite" schools, the magnets or schools of choice come to be looked upon by parents and the community at large as the system's best or "first class" schools while the schools not available for choice come to be seen as the "ordinary" schools.

This problem becomes particularly acute in the case of magnets or schools of choice that are selective, that is, schools that restrict their enrollments to students who meet some set of criteria or standards. In most cases, these standards are either academic or behavioral (and in many cases both) and are based on

past academic achievement (good grades and good test scores) or upon the passing of an entrance examination, again most often of an "academic" nature.

Excessive Expectations

While there is every reason for parents to hope and even to expect that "magnet" schools and/or schools of choice will produce "better" education for their children, there is a genuine danger that in the process of planning a system of parent choice expectations will be raised that few school systems -- if any -- will actually be able to fulfill. Some excessive expectations are:

- that the system will immediately be able to create all of the different kinds of schools parents want. Although the teachers and other professionals in most systems will probably be able to create very traditional schools and non-graded or continuous progress schools, they may well not be able to immediately create some of the more unusual choices, such as "open" or developmental schooling or "micro-society" schooling or schools that have a very special curricular emphasis, such as the arts or science and technology. A good case in point here is the creation of Montessori schools, which require teachers with special training and certification.

- that all parents will be able to have their first choice of schooling for each of their children. While this may turn out to be true for 80 to 90% of the parents in any given system, it will probably not be possible for all parents to receive their first choices, especially in those cases where only a few magnets or schools of choice have been created and/or desegregation and civil rights guidelines must be scrupulously followed.

Re-segregation

Parent choice plans that, for whatever reasons, are limited to majority parents and children would be clearly antithetical to the basic idea of parent choice as a device for promoting educational equity in our public school systems. In any situation a plan that does not take into full account the rights of low-income and minority children is clearly unacceptable.

The survey model described here is clearly aimed at obtaining the kind of information that will make it possible for planners to make sure that the options desired by parents are equally desired by both majority and minority parents and thus also makes it possible for a school system to provide only those options which will lead to greater equality of access for all students in the system and especially for all low-income and minority students.

THREE: PLANNING SURVEYS FOR PARENT/PROFESSIONAL CHOICE

An Overview of the Planning Process:
Planning As Community Education

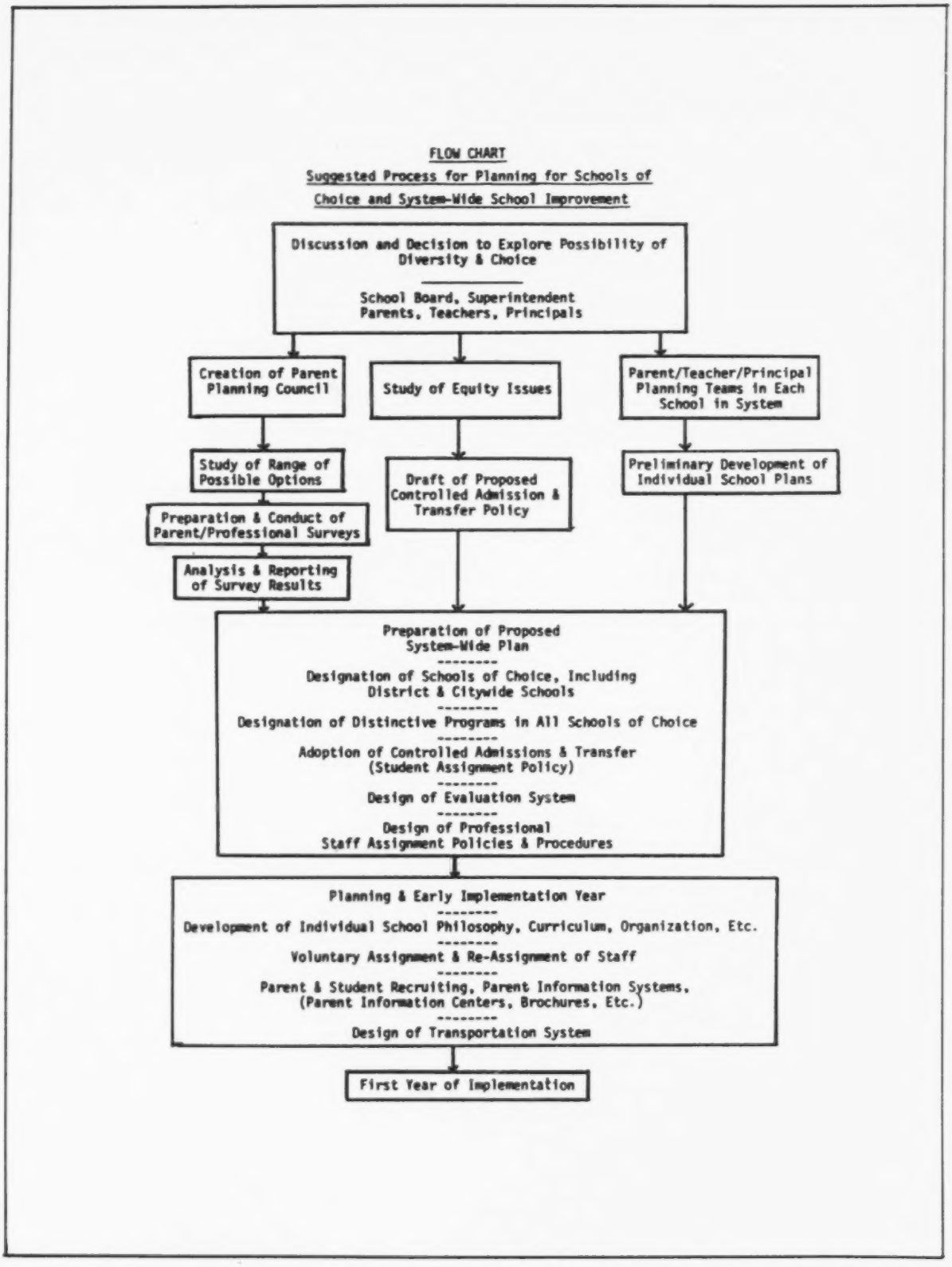
We do not mean to imply that parent surveys alone will address all of the pitfalls described above. Rather, it is the overall planning process, of which the survey is one very important step, that can nip these problems in the bud.

This kind of careful planning requires a step-by-step planning process that essentially becomes a parent/professional/community <u>educational</u> process. Everyone learns in course of this process, everyone gradually becomes more sophisticated about what choice can mean to them and to the community as a whole (see the chart on the next page).

"Step-by-step" also means that a school system and its board of education need not decide at the very beginning that choice is to be the new way the system will be organized.

On the contrary, each step in the process should be thought of as a feasibility study which, if successfully completed, leads to a decision as to whether the school system should undertake the next step.

There is no need -- indeed, it is probably unwise (unless desegregation requires it) -- to try to decide at the very beginning of the process that system-wide choice should be implemented. Nor should any attempt be made to predetermine the precise outcomes of the planning process before everyone (parents, school board, central administrators, teachers,


FLOW CHART
Suggested Process for Planning for Schools of
Choice and System-Wide School Improvement
Discussion and Decision to Explore Possibility of Diversity & Choice
School Board, Superintendent
Parents, Teachers, Principals
Creation of Parent Planning Council
Study of Equity Issues
Parent/Teacher/Principal Planning Teams in Each School in System
Study of Range of Possible Options
Draft of Proposed Controlled Admission & Transfer Policy
Preliminary Development of Individual School Plans
Preparation & Conduct of Parent/Professional Surveys
Analysis & Reporting of Survey Results
Preparation of Proposed System-Wide Plan
Designation of Schools of Choice, Including District & Citywide Schools
Designation of Distinctive Programs in All Schools of Choice
Adoption of Controlled Admissions & Transfer (Student Assignment Policy)
Design of Evaluation System
Design of Professional Staff Assignment Policies & Procedures
Planning & Early Implementation Year
Development of Individual School Philosophy, Curriculum, Organization, Etc.
Voluntary Assignment & Re-Assignment of Staff
Parent & Student Recruiting, Parent Information Systems, (Parent Information Centers, Brochures, Etc.)
Design of Transportation System
First Year of Implementation

principals and the community at-large) fully understands precisely what choice will mean and has had a chance to become comfortable with it.

Time Lines

A careful, step-by-step planning process will take time. Assuming for a moment that each stage of the feasibility study results in a decision to proceed, it will take at least a year simply to go through the community education and parent/professional survey process. It will probably take another year for the initial planning and staffing of the selected schools of choice and working out all of the administrative details such as transportation, student assignment and so on. At the end of this two-year period, schools of choice should be ready to open their doors and to begin the process of fully developing their distinctive characteristics.

If planners decide on system-wide choice (every school in the system becoming a school of choice) as the goal of the process, then we are probably talking about a period of five years -- depending upon the size and complexity of the system -- before that goal can be reached.

Stages of the Planning Process

The planning process outlined here is based upon the process developed in the desegregating communities of Massachusetts, and in particular the four communities of Lowell, Worcester, Fall

River and New Bedford. No single Massachusetts community has followed precisely this process in its entirety, but the experiences of the four school systems, with added experience drawn from "magnet" and schools of choice systems being developed elsewhere in the country, strongly suggest that the process described here works and can be used in any school system.

In the cases of the four Massachusetts communities, the initial reasons for creating magnet schools and providing parents with choice arose from the need to desegregate. This has been true as well in almost every other community that has created magnets, including most of our larger urban school systems.

Indeed, it is perhaps just a bit ironic that something that has proved to be highly popular (parent choice) has emerged from something that many school systems and communities have barely tolerated (desegregation).

Recently, however, many communities have begun to think about instituting both parent and professional choice quite apart from any necessity to desegregate (the small city of Lexington, North Carolina, is one example of this). And many other school systems, having discovered the educational benefits of choice through their desegregative magnet school programs, are thinking seriously about extending parent choice to <u>all</u> schools in their system, thus making <u>every</u> school a "magnet" school. Fall River is an example of this.

However, for whatever reasons a local school system may decide to move in the direction of choice, it is wise to proceed

with caution, not only to avoid the pitfalls mentioned above but also to ensure that the school system does not make any precipitous decisions before the community as a whole is really prepared to do so.

Exploring the Possibility of Choice

The initial impetus either to expand an existing magnet system into a district-wide system of choice or to institute such a system where no choice has previously existed can come from a number of sources.

In some cases, such as in Buffalo, the driving force can be the superintendent (Eugene T. Reville, in Buffalo's case). In other systems, such as in Worcester, Massachusetts, while the original instigation may have come from the superintendent (John E. Durkin), the central administration and the local school board, it has been the enthusiastic response of parents that has carried the program forward.

In all cases, of course, whatever the source of the initial impetus may be, it is the local board of education that must make the decision to begin to explore the possibilities of choice.

The first step in such a process, therefore, is for the local school board to be presented with a plan spelling out what the various stages of the planning process should be, how each stage will be conducted, who will be involved and how each stage provides a clear way for the board and the central administration to make a judgment as to whether to proceed to the next stage.

Designing the Planning Process

Such a "plan for planning" should be made up of the following stages:

- Public discussion, establishment of parent, community and professional involvement mechanisms
- Information gathering
- Parent/professional surveys
- Analysis of results
- Development of a staged implementation plan, including cost analysis
- Design of evaluation process
- Implementation

Getting Parents and the Community Involved

The first assumption that has to be made in launching an exploration into the possibilities of choice is that no one -- not even the central office administrators or the teachers and certainly not the parents -- are going to be fully aware of what all of the possible choices might be and how a system of diversity and choice is going to work.

Thus the first step must be a period of information gathering and public discussion of what the full range of educationally sound and legitimate kinds of schooling might be and what particular options or choices might be of particular interest to the parents and teachers of the school system.

The Citywide Parent Planning Council

One of the best ways we know of to conduct such information gathering and public discussion is the creation of a citywide parent/community planning council. In Lowell and Worcester, these councils were made up of two parent representatives (one voting representative and an alternate) from each of the city's schools. In other cities, such as in New Bedford and Fall River, the council membership has been broadened to include non-parent members of the community.

Such a parent or parent/community council, assisted by the central administration and often using outside consultants to provide technical assistance, has three main jobs:

1. to investigate what other cities and school systems have done in creating a wide range of educational options. Ideally, teams of parents and teachers should actually visit as many different kinds of schools as possible and see them in operation.

In Lowell, for instance, members of the parent council, using funds provided through the federal Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA), travelled to most of the major "magnet" school cities in the East and Midwest, including Buffalo, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Milwaukee and Minneapolis. They returned enthusiastic about what they has seen and eager to see a range of choices made available in Lowell.

A companion volume to this handbook, A Consumer's Guide to Schools of Choice, should be of considerable use to both parents and school people in this process.

2. to select from this broad range somewhere between five to ten different types of schools that council members believe parents would be most interested in being offered.

This range of choices should concentrate on fundamentally different approaches to schooling (the three basic "options" described in the Consumer's Guide) -- starting with a very traditional, "back to basics" type of schooling, for instance, and also perhaps including a continuous progress approach, a Montessori school, a developmental or "open education" school and perhaps even a "micro-society" school.

A second range of choices should be schools that use one of the above basic approaches to schooling but also have a particular curricular emphasis -- such as science and technology, the fine and performing arts, foreign languages or computers.

3. to become familiar with this broad range of educational possibilities and be able to explain to other parents what the differences among them are, what each is aiming to accomplish and why it might be the best kind of school for a particular child. It is the membership of the parent council that will serve as one of the main sources of information and help to other parents.

Informing the Media and the Community

In addition to and working closely along the parent/community council, districts should also conduct a concerted effort to involve all forms of local media -- not only the newspapers but television as well and in particular the local access channels of local cable systems, if such systems exist.

All meetings of the parent council should, of course, be open to the public and to the media. The fact that the school system and the council are exploring the possibility of creating schools of choice should be as widely publicized as possible and the media should be encouraged to follow the planning in detail.

Professional Involvement:
Teachers, Principals and Unions

In addition to involving parents in the planning process, it is obviously of equal importance to involve the school system's professional staff. And this means <u>all</u> teachers and <u>all</u> principals in the system, not just the handful that may express intense interest right from the start.

While the parental preferences must in the long run take preference over professional preferences (it is after all the parents and their children who are the clients to be served here), there is not much point in talking about the different kinds of schools parents want if there is not a complementary desire on the part of the teachers and principals to practice the different kinds of schooling that parents are asking for.

There is also a real danger here that the teachers and principals will feel that they are somehow being "left out" of the planning process if they and their wishes seem to be ignored. If this happens, if the exploration into schools of choice is seen as serving only parents, professionals resentment might lead to a backlash against schools of choice.

What is crucial here is that teachers and principals begin to see the advantages <u>to them</u> of being able to choose the kind of schooling they would like to practice. Rather than simply being assigned to whatever school happens to have a vacancy, the ability to choose means that a teacher (and/or a principal) will find himself or herself sharing professional aims with the other staff and with the parents of the school as well.

This "shared sense of mission," this agreement among a school's parent body and professional staff as to what the aims of education are and what the best methods are for achieving those aims, is perhaps the best way we know of achieving educational excellence and of providing teachers and principals with professional satisfaction.

Conducting the Parent/Professional Surveys

Assuming that a school system has progressed through all of the early stages described above and has decided to continue the planning process, the moment has arrived for the conduct of parent/professional surveys.

At this point, the citywide parent/community planning council, the central administration and the system's teachers and principals should have completed their exploratory work and should have arrived at a consensus about the range of schools of choice that parents in particular but everyone else as well thinks might be most appropriate for the school system in question.

The options selected for inclusion in the survey should then be made into a questionnaire similiar to the two offered as examples in Section Two above. The approved survey form must then be translated into all appropriate languages, depending upon the language groups served by the school system. The completed forms must then be printed in sufficient numbers to make sure that the parents of every targeted child in the system can receive one.

As discussed earlier, experience suggests that the best method of distribution is to have the survey forms distributed to students by their classroom teachers with strict admonitions that they be delivered to parents and then returned by the students within the specified time period. Suitable rewards can also be employed to impress upon students and their parents the importance of completing and returning the forms.

Instructions to Parents Taking the Survey

In both Lowell and Worcester, the citywide parent survey was conducted essentially by the Citywide Parent Planning Council,

with assistance, from the central administration. This was done so that the parents receiving the survey forms could clearly see that other parents were directly responsible for designing and conducting the survey.

In all four cases, parents were asked to do the following things:

1. To read the survey carefully and, in particular, to read the descriptions of the possible educational choices carefully.

2. To make first, second and third choices among the various possibilities either for all of their children or for each of their children individually. It should be made clear that parents may make different choices for their individual children if they believe no single school will adequately serve all of them. They may choose not to make any choices at all, but should be encouraged to return the survey form anyway.

3. To answer the question asking whether -- if they have chosen one or more particular options -- they would be willing to have their children transported in order to enroll them in the option of parental choice.

4. To fill in the information on the survey form -- their names, children's names, grade levels and the number of children the parents are responding for in the case of each of the options selected, the racial/ethnic group of the children, etc.

Analyzing the Survey Results

In the case of the parent surveys, all survey forms should be returned first to the students' schools and then be forwarded to the central office for compilation and analysis. For any large-scale survey, such compilation and analysis will greatly expedited by the use of data processing techniques and a simple computer program for the analysis of results.

The analysis of parent surveys should include and report the following information:

1. the total number of parental responses, reported as one response for each child listed on a survey form (if a parent responds for four children, that is four responses). This figure should then be broken down into the following categories:

a. minority and non-minority responses according to Office of Civil Rights categories (black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and other).

b. public school, non-public school and pre-school responses.

c. tally of responses by each individual public school

2. the total percentage of such responses (the number of children responded for divided by the total number of children in the survey group). This figure should then also broken down by minority and non-minority, public school, non-public school and pre-school (if accurate figures are available for total non-public school and pre-school).

3. a breakdown of the total responses by choice of educational option (including first, second and third choices) and by minority/non-minority, public school/non-public school and pre-school categories.

4. a breakdown of the parental choices by each existing individual school in the system by minority/non-minority.

5. the number and percentage of positive responses to the transportation question and a breakdown of the responses by minority/non-minority, public school/non-public, and pre-school.

The following are parent results for the Worcester citywide survey:

March 10, 1982

MAGNET SCHOOL SURVEY

SUMMARY SHEET

Total Responses	5,234 out of 14,311 = 37% return		
Total Majority	4,393	or	84% of responses
Total Minority	841	or	16% of responses

Ranking of 1st choices of kinds of schools:

		% of total	% of tot. Maj.	% of tot. Min.
1.	Fundamental = 2,111	40%	43%	2[illegible]
2.	Contiguous Progress = 1,790	34%	35%	2[illegible]
3.	Developmental = 425	8%	8%	11%
4.	Montessori = 424	8%	8%	9%
5.	Micro-society = 257	5%	5%	6%

Ranking of combined 1st and 2nd choices of kinds of schools:

1. Continuous Progress
2. Fundamental
3. Developmental
4. Montessori
5. Micro-society

Ranking of 1st choices, kinds of Educational Programs (Themes):

		% of total	% of tot. Maj.	% of tot. Min
1.	Science and Technology	30%	30%	27%
2.	Gifted and Talented	29%	32%	18%
3.	Fine Arts	16%	16%	17%
4.	Physical Health	12%	11%	13%
5.	Multi-Cultural	4%	3%	6%

Ranking of combined 1st and 2nd choices, kinds of Educational Programs (Themes):

1. Talented and Gifted
2. Science and Technology
3. Fine Arts
4. Physical Health
5. Multi-Cultural

Transportation

	% of Total	% of Tot. Maj.	% of Tot. Min.
Total "Yes" to transporting children to 1st choice = 1,821 or	35%	31%	52%
Total "Maybe" willing to transport = 1,515 or	30%		
Total "Yes" and "Maybe" = 3,336 or	64%		

All-day Kindergarten for Magnet Schools:

	% of Total	% of Tot. Maj.	% of Tot. Min.
In Favor = 1,775 or	40%	29%	60%

Combined Summary of "Yes" to transportation by First Choice of Kinds of Schools

	Total	Majority	Minority
1. Continuous Progress	610	481	129
2. Fundamental	521	423	98
3. Developmental	179	149	30
4. Montessori	191	148	34
5. Micro-Society	125	104	21

Combined Summary of "Yes" to transportation by First Choice of Educational Program

	Total	Majority	Minority
1. Science and Technology	459	386	111
2. Gifted and Talented	502	437	65
3. Fine Arts	322	249	63
4. Physical Health	213	170	43
5. Multi-Cultural	92	63	29

Combined Summary of "Yes" to transportation by First Choice of Kind of School and Educational Program

	Science/Tech.	Phys. Health	Fine Arts	Gifted	Multi-Cult.	
Continuous	134	50	90	181	26	Majority
	50	24	24	22	9	Minority
Developmental	29	32	37	40	11	Majority
	8	7	10	3	2	Minority
Fundamental	152	59	66	134	12	Majority
	38	5	20	25	10	Minority
Montessori	25	16	33	62	12	Majority
	11	5	14	10	3	Minority

Combined Summary of
"Yes" to transportation by First Choice of
Kind of School and Educational Program (continued)

	Science/Tech.	Phys. Health	Fine Arts	Gifted	Multi-Cult.	
Microsociety	46	13	23	20	2	Majority
	4	2	5	5	5	Minority

Magnet School Planning Office

The following are the result sheets for the parent/teacher/principal survey conducted in New Bedford. It is important to note here that there is a procedural error in the calculation of the parent return rate for this survey. Parent responses were recorded as one response for each survey form returned rather than for the number of children for whom the parents were responding. Thus, the actual response rate per child in the school system was considerably higher than the stated 44.7%:

V. Appendices: Parent and Teacher Survey Results

PARENT AND TEACHER SURVEY RESULTS

Both the parent and teacher surveys were distributed during the week of April 14th, 1986. All concerned were asked to return the surveys to the Chapter 636 Office by Friday, April 18th. Results were tabulated during the following two weeks and can be reported as follows.

Both parents and teachers were asked to rate the descriptions of possible magnet school themes from 1 to 5. A response of 1 indicated a very negative rating, while a response of 5 indicated a very positive rating.

Teacher Surveys

Surveys were distributed to all elementary school teachers and principals. 554 surveys were sent and 357 surveys were returned, for a 64.4% return rate.

In response to question number one, "In order to be able to practice the kind of schooling you wish to practice, would you be willing to ask for a voluntary transfer to a school of that type?", the following responses were gathered:

yes -	70	19.61%
no -	99	27.73%
maybe -	152	42.58%
no response -	36	10.08%

A total of 62.19% of the teachers indicated a willingness to transfer or at least consider a voluntary transfer to a magnet school.

Teachers and principals rated the nine school themes as follows:

Advanced Studies School	1,382 points
Communications School	1,242 points
Math/Science Technology School	1,219 points
Integrated Learning School	1,158 points
World of Work School	1,130 points
Arts School	1,110 points
Foreign Language School	1,013 points
International School	1,001 points
Physical Health and Education School	969 points

Parent Surveys

English, Spanish, and Portuguese surveys were distributed to 8,727 elementary school students. Families having more than one child were asked to return only one survey. 3,901 surveys were returned, for a 44.7% return rate.

In response to question number one, "In order to have your child attend the kind of magnet school you want, would you be willing to have your child go to school outside his/her neighborhood district, with FREE transportation provided?", the following responses were gathered:

yes -	1742	44.66%
no -	890	22.81%
maybe -	1200	30.76%

A total of 75.42 % of the parents indicated a willingness to or at least consider to send their children to a school other than their neighborhood school.

The racial breakdown of those families completing the questionnaires is as follows:

American Indian	38	.97%
Black	86	2.20%
Cape Verdean	399	10.23%
Hispanic	213	5.46%
Oriental/Asian	15	.38%
White/Non-Hispanic	2845	72.93%
Other	79	2.03%

Minority returns were equal to 19.24% of the total number of returns (other not included).

Parents rated the nine school themes as follows:

World of Work School	11,762 points
Math/Science Technology School	11,469 points
Advanced Studies School	11,438 points
Communications School	11,280 points
Arts School	10,934 points
Integrated Learning School	10,884 points
Foreign Language School	10,883 points
Physical Health and Education School	10,547 points
International School	9,686 points

SURVEY RESULTS OF PROPOSED MAGNET SCHOOLS

Carney Academy

36 of 47 educators responded:		417 of 687 parents responded:	
Advanced	150 points	Advanced	1352 points
Communications	143 points	Communications	1324 points
Integrated Lrng.	129 points	Math/Science	1314 points
Arts	126 points	World of Work	1295 points
World of Work	125 points	Integrated Lrng.	1248 points
Math/Science	125 points	Foreign Language	1246 points
International	121 points	Arts	1219 points
Phys. Ed./Health	117 points	Phys. Ed./Health	1217 points
Foreign Language	115 points	International	1148 points

Goess School

26 of 55 educators responded:		248 of 732 parents responded:	
Advanced	98 points	World of Work	690 points
Integrated Lrng.	92 points	Math/Science	673 points
Communications	91 points	Arts	665 points
Math/Science	88 points	Integrated Lrng.	641 points
Arts	79 points	Foreign Language	640 points
World of Work	78 points	Phys. Ed./Health	612 points
Phys. Ed./Health	70 points	Communications	607 points
Foreign Language	68 points	Advanced	597 points
International	65 points	International	580 points

Pulaski School

28 of 32 educators responded:		362 of 480 parents responded:	
Advanced	120 points	Math/Science	1156 points
Math/Science	98 points	Advanced	1153 points
Communications	97 points	World of Work	1126 points
Arts	90 points	Communications	1089 points
World of Work	88 points	Arts	1071 points
Integrated Lrng.	88 points	Foreign Language	1020 points
Foreign Language	77 points	Integrated Lrng.	1014 points
International	75 points	Phys. Ed./Health	1003 points
Phys. Ed./Health	75 points	International	899 points

A thorough analysis of the results of the parent and teacher surveys should give the system's planners the following types of information:

1. An overall indication of the degree to which parents respond positively to the idea of being able to choose the kind of schooling their children will receive. Any parent who responds and indicates his or her choice is taken here as a positive response. It is not necessarily assumed, however, that a parent who does not respond is not interested in choice.

2. A ranking of the educational choices made by parents, ranging from most desired to least desired. This will give planners a general idea of how many schools of each kind of option will be necessary to satisfy the parent demand for that option.

3. Which of the options are sufficiently desired by parents in individual existing schools to make possible the conversion of those schools into the option most desired by those parents.

4. Which of the options are desired by a smaller number of parents (and probably not concentrated in any existing school), thereby indicating that these options should be set up as citywide schools drawing from all over the school district.

5. How many parents would favor their children to being transported in order to receive their first choice option. In the case of Worcester, "maybe" responses were interpreted as at least mildly positive.

6. A rough idea of what the minority/non-minority balance would be in the schools of choice as a result of parental choice. This information is obviously crucial in any situation where desegregation is required and schools of choice are being used as one of the primary methods of achieving such desegregation.

The results of the teacher/principal surveys should yield the following information:

1. A ranking of the educational choices made by teachers and principals.

2. A general idea of how the teacher/principal choices break down by individual school.

3. The number of teachers (and principals) who would be willing voluntarily to transfer from their present schools in order to practice the kind of schooling they have chosen.

When the results of the parent surveys and the results of the teacher/principal surveys are looked at in their entirety,

the system planners should be able to determine whether there is a workable match between the kinds of schooling parents want for their children and the kinds of schooling teachers and principals wish to practice.

In the case of New Bedford, for instance, the overall results show a lack of complete agreement concerning the kinds of schooling the parents want and the kinds of schooling the professionals in the system wish to offer. In two of the individual schools, however, (Carney and Pulaski) there is almost total agreement on the most popular options. At the third school (Gomes), the disagreement is considerable.

This indicates that in New Bedford, there will most likely have to be considerable shifting of school personnel in order to provide parents with the kind of schooling they want.

FOUR: REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

Some Nuts and Bolts Issues About Surveys

Although the parent and professional survey results such as these from a handful of Massachusetts communities are both useful and instructive, all such surveys and their results must -- of course -- be viewed with and used with considerable caution.

More About Sampling

These surveys are not, for instance, statistically valid samples of the total parent or teacher population of their communities, nor do they tell us much about that segment of the parent and professional populations who, for whatever reasons, chose not to respond.

What such surveys can and in most cases do accomplish, however, is to provide school people (as well as parents and the public at-large) not only with some general indications of what parents and teachers might like to see happen to and with their public schools (such as whether parent and professional choice should be instituted) but also some very specific information about the different kinds of schooling parents and teachers want.

While such specific information should never be treated as conclusive, it does give planners a rough idea about the number of actual parents who would choose specific kinds of schooling for their children and who would allow their children to be

transported. Given this type of information, planners can make intelligent projections about what kinds of schools of choice the system should provide and how many of each kind might be required to fill the known parent demand.

How High a Response Rate Is High Enough?

While a response rate of 100% is obviously the ideal here, such a high response is unlikely for a community that is just beginning to think about providing schools of choice. Nor is such a high response rate necessary for a local school board and administration to decide to move in this direction. What is minimally needed is a response rate high enough so that planners are supplied with enough data to answer the question of whether at least one school of choice could be created with the assurance that a sufficient number of parents would volunteer their children for enrollment so that the school would be filled.

We know of no instance where the response rate has been so low that a district could not contemplate creating <u>one</u> school of choice. Indeed, the Massachusetts experience suggests just the opposite -- that in almost every instance parents want a wide range of different kinds of schools and that the problem most school systems face is that of providing the full range of schools parents would like to have.

For instance, in the first Worcester survey results with a 37% response rate, enough parents chose developmental, Montessori and micro-society schooling and also said "yes" to transportation

to justify creating all three of those schools (the figures being 179 students for developmental, 191 for Montessori and 125 for micro-society). Worcester has not yet created any of those schools.

Strategies for Increasing Response Rates

In addition to strategies that involve simply conducting the survey process more efficiently (better policing of whether survey forms actually get home and more intensive efforts to get parents to answer the survey), the most effective ways of increasing the response rate for parent surveys are probably these:

1. Conduct more surveys. In Worcester, as an instance, the city's first survey response rate was 37%. The following year (and after three schools of choice had been created as a result of that first survey) the system conducted a second survey, this one limited to one quadrant of the city. The survey and the creation of the next round of schools of choice were limited to that one section of the city in order to reduce the need for transportation. The response rate on that second survey went up to 49%. A third survey was conducted the next year in another quadrant of the city (and after three more schools of choice had been established). In this third survey, the response rate went up to 80%. The parents of Worcester, through the previous surveys and the success of the schools of choice program, were clearly becoming increasingly knowledgeable about, interested in

and increasingly eager to make choices and therefore to respond to the surveys. In addition, district staff were becoming more experienced in conducting the surveys.

2. Create schools of choice based on the survey results. Again using Worcester as an example, it seemed clear to the school system's planners that, in addition to the repeated surveying, it was the success of the schools of choice themselves that produced increased response rates in subsequent surveys. Parents learned one lesson from the city's first survey and the creation of those first schools of choice: the surveys were not just "Mickey Mouse" exercises that no one was going to take seriously. When parents responded to the surveys and said they wanted schools of choice, they got them. They did not get every one that they asked for (as yet), but someone down at school headquarters really did pay attention to those survey results.

What Happens When the Choices of Parents and Professionals Don't Match?

This is an interesting question and one that arises to some extent in the New Bedford results. The simple answer is that in every case, the desires of parents should take precedence over the desires of professionals, since parents and their children are the direct clients of every public school system as well as citizens and taxpayers. In both theory and in the best of practice, it is the job of the local board of education and the school system to provide the range of different kinds of schooling parents want.

In the real world of public schooling, however, it is unlikely that any public system will have immediately on hand a teaching staff trained in the various approaches called for by parent and professional choice. This is particularly true for the more unusual kinds of schooling such as Montessori, developmental or micro-society, and it can also be true for schools with curricular specialties such as the arts or science and technology.

In every instance we know of so far, however, there has never been a case where there was no agreement between parents and professionals. So the obvious path to take here is to begin the process by creating those schools of choice upon which parents and professionals are agreed and then to begin an intensive process of staff development to prepare teachers for the remaining schools parents want.

What To Do With a High Proportion of "Maybe" Responses

In most cases, a "maybe" response has been taken to mean that the parent or teacher is simply waiting to see what happens or wants more information before making up his or her mind.

While a "maybe" response is clearly not as positive as a straightforward "yes," it at least indicates a willingness to consider the possibility of having a child bused (in the case of a parent) or of a voluntary transfer (in the case of a teacher). Thus, in both parent and teacher cases, such a response should be taken as at least partially positive. In all known survey cases

so far, the proportion of "yes" and "maybe" responses for both parents and teachers has exceeded the outright "no" responses. This has in every case been interpreted by school system planners as a signal that the planning should continue so that, as more information becomes available and both parents and teachers become more familiar with the possibilities of choice, the "maybe" responses have a chance to turn into "yes" responses.

Some Things We Have Learned So Far

While the results of parent and professional surveys in the Massachusetts communities do not provide us with conclusive evidence, the surveys have provided some suggestive data concerning some of the major questions surrounding the introduction of parent and professional choice in our school systems.

We are not, of course, claiming to have arrived at definitive answers to any of these questions. We are saying only that the limited information obtained in Massachusetts cases by actually asking parents (and teachers and principals) what they do want (and also drawing upon information obtained from other "schools of choice" situations around the country) makes it possible at least to suggest the following hypotheses:

- The results so far suggest that many parents do want to be able to choose the kind of school their children will

attend, whether that school is the neighborhood school or a non-neighborhood school.

- It is not necessarily true that most American parents only want their children to attend their "neighborhood" school and that they are unwilling to have their children transported to a school outside their neighborhood. The survey results suggest that many parents are quite willing to have their children bused to a non-neighborhood school if that school at the end of the bus ride provides the parents with the kind of public schooling they want for their children.

- It is also not necessarily true that most American public school parents want very traditional "back to basics" schools. While in many surveys this turned out to be the single most desired kind of schooling, the majority of the respondents asked for non-traditional schools. Perhaps the most interesting case in point here is that in Lowell the two most desired schools were a kindergarten through grade 8 citywide school devoted to the fine, performing and applied arts and a kindergarten through grade 8 citywide "micro-society" school in which students design and operate their own democratic, free-market society in school. Both of these schools now exist in Lowell.

- It also does not appear to be necessarily true that poor and minority parents, in particular, want their children to attend traditional, back to basics schools. Indeed, just the opposite appears to be the case, that minority parents are more likely than non-minority parents to choose non-traditional schools.

- There is also reason to question the idea that most parents don't know enough about "different kinds of schools" to make a decision about what they want for their children, that all they want is "good" schools and that they don't care about a school's philosophy or curriculum. A large number of parents who responded to these surveys seemed to feel quite capable and eager to choose an educational approach. In short, many parents -- including poor and minority parents -- appear to be much more sophisticated about these matters than most school people imagine.

- Nor does it seem to be necessarily true that most parents want their children to go to school only with students of the same race, ethnic group and social class.

This, of course, is an important and difficult question, and there is again, of course, considerable evidence that such

racial, ethnic and social class attitudes are in many ways strongly entrenched in American society. The evidence of these surveys, however, as well as conversations with parents in these four cities strongly suggest to us that many parents -- not all parents but many parents -- are quite willing (and some of them are positively eager) to have their children in racially, ethnically and socially mixed schools if they can choose the schools their children will attend and if they can be assured that those schools are high quality schools advocating an educational philosophy of parents' own choosing.

FIVE: FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the process of planning for parent and professional choice, contact:

Evans Clinchy
Senior Field Associate
Insititute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309

Those who coordinated the planning and survey efforts cited in this handbook included:

George Tsapatsaris
Project Director for Magnet Schools
Lowell Public Schools
89 Appleton Street
Lowell, MA 01852
(617) 937-7614

Roland Charpentier
Magnet School Planning Coordinator
Worcester Public Schools
20 Irving Street
Worcester, MA 01609
(617) 799-3033

James A. Wallace
Equal Educational Opportunities Planner
Fall River Public Schools
417 Rock Street
Fall River, MA 02720
(617) 678-4571

or

Martin Barney
Director of Federal Programs
(same address)
(617) 675-8433

Diane Souza
Chapter 636 Coordinator
New Bedford Public Schools
455 County Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
(617) 997-4511

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

The series of publications, "Parent Choice and the Public Schools," of which this volume is a part, has been developed and published by the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE).

IRE is a Boston-based national, non-profit research and advocacy organization with a 14 year history of work designed to make schools more responsive to citizen and parent involvement and concerns. Although private and independent, IRE is housed at Boston University, where its President and founder, Don Davies, formerly Deputy Commissioner in the United States Office of Education, is now Professor in the School of Education. All of IRE's work centers on two premises: that parent and citizen participation is an essential ingredient in school improvement and that citizen access to information is indispensable for efficient participation.

IRE conducts several other projects focusing on parent choice. The magazine Equity and Choice (three times a year) reports on much of this work. Working closely with school districts around the country, IRE provides technical assistance and consulting aimed at promoting parental choice within public school systems. Participating school systems and interested others have also joined a network, the National Partnership for Parent Choice in the Public Schools, to share their experiences and insights. For information on any of these activities, contact:

Evans Clinchy
Senior Field Associate
Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309